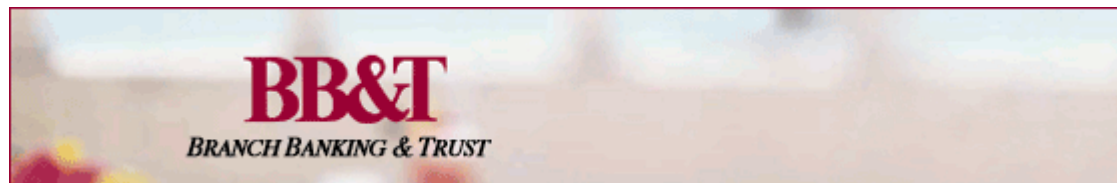


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Vinegar for Kentucky's vineyards

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As many as half of Kentucky's farm-based wineries say they could be put out of business by a bill that the Senate has approved.

Small wineries would no longer be allowed to sell directly to retailers but would have to market their wines through wholesalers, reducing their already sparse profits.

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This would reverse lawmakers, past efforts to help small farms survive by starting vineyards.

About 40 small wineries have opened in Kentucky, some with help from tobacco settlement money distributed by the state Agriculture Development Board.

Until now lawmakers have tried to make it easier for small wineries

to start restaurants and bed-and-breakfasts and sell their wines. Lawmakers allowed them to sell directly to retailers. The wineries produce such small volumes that most wholesale distributors wouldn't bother with them. Also, some wineries are in dry counties, where liquor distributors never send trucks.

Sponsored by Sens. Gary Tapp and Dick Roeding, Senate Bill 82 appears to be an overreaction to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling on interstate wine sales.

A better alternative, Rep. Rick Rand's House Bill 507, moved out of committee this week. It more narrowly responds to the Court ruling without harming fledgling winemakers.

Kentucky has invested too much public money in encouraging small-farm entrepreneurs to pull the rug out from under them now.

An editorial in the Lexington Herald-Leader.

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